

## CITY OF ALAMEDA

### Memorandum

To: Honorable Mayor and  
Members of the City Council

From: Lisa Goldman  
Acting City Manager

Date: March 15, 2011

Re: Approve Modifications to the Paratransit Taxi Service, Appropriate \$5,000  
in Measure B Funds, and Authorize the Acting City Manager to Execute all  
Necessary Documents

### BACKGROUND

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires transit agencies to offer equivalent paratransit service for persons certified as unable to drive or take public transit. Paratransit services must be made available to eligible users within 3/4 mile of the existing fixed transit routes during normal operating hours. In Alameda, the mandated paratransit service is provided by East Bay Paratransit (EBP).

Measure B, the Alameda County half-cent sales tax for transportation, provides a dedicated funding source for non-mandated, locally based paratransit services for people with disabilities and non-disabled seniors. The City of Alameda uses these funds to provide supplemental paratransit services to address service gaps, as well as to provide additional non-mandated services.

### DISCUSSION

The Paratransit Program offers two taxi services: the Medical Return Trip Improvement Program (MRTIP) and the Premium Taxi Service. MRTIP is available free of charge to EBP certified riders with no travel restrictions. This service provides an unlimited number of free taxi trips when returning home from medical appointments, thereby eliminating the uncertainty of coordinating return trips with EBP.

The Premium Taxi Service provides eligible residents a 50% discount on taxi rides with the City's transportation providers. This service is available to residents who are: EBP-certified; 75 years of age or older; or 70 years of age or older without a driver's license. Discount travel vouchers, which must be purchased in advance, are valued at \$5.00 but cost \$2.50. Individuals are limited to a maximum of ten travel vouchers per quarter, and multiple travel vouchers may be used per trip. For participants using a wheelchair and requiring a lift-equipped van, wheelchair travel vouchers are available at \$2.50 each, with no distance restrictions due to unavailability of lift-equipped vans with taxi meters.

**City Council**  
**Agenda Item #5-Eii**  
**03-15-11**

There are currently 581 individuals enrolled in the Paratransit taxi programs, with approximately 60 active users each month. This represents a small portion of the population eligible to receive these program benefits. According to the 2009 American Community Survey, there are over 10,000 individuals 65 years and older and almost 7,000 individuals with disabilities in the City of Alameda. It is these individuals, seniors and individuals with disabilities, that the City's Paratransit Program aims to serve.

To expand the Paratransit Program and provide for more efficient use of funds, Public Works staff proposes the following modifications to the existing taxi services:

1. **Assign Alameda County as the Boundary for the Premium Taxi Service and MRTIP** – Based on Public Works staff's analysis of the taxi program usage for the past year, the average cost for trips outside of Alameda County was approximately \$50 per trip, whereas the average cost within Alameda County was under \$20. During the past year, approximately 100 trips were taken outside Alameda County, which averages almost eight trips per month (see Table 1). Since the current program allows participants to travel for unlimited distances, continuing the program as is could result in substantial unbudgeted costs.

**Table 1 - Paratransit Taxi Service Trips Taken Out-of-Alameda County**

Nov 2009 – Oct 2010	MRTIP		Premium		Total		Average	
	Number of Trips	Total Cost	Number of Trips	Total Cost	Number of Trips	Total Cost	Number of Trips per Month	Total Cost per Month
Total	95	\$4,703	6	\$368	101	\$5,071	8	\$423

To determine what changes, if any, should be made to the City's program, staff conducted a review of Paratransit taxi services offered by other cities in northern Alameda County. All surveyed jurisdictions impose a geographical limit to the area covered by their services. For example, Oakland limits its taxi service to North Alameda County; Berkeley has a 50-mile restriction; and Albany has an East Bay only restriction.

To be consistent with other jurisdictions and reduce the program's overall costs, staff proposes to restrict the use of the taxi services to Alameda County. In addition, since almost all of the trips outside the County were made to/from San Francisco, a location served by EBP for all EBP-eligible residents, staff expects limited impacts to the taxi service users from this modification. Furthermore, as Measure B is a countywide tax, and since the county offers a wide variety of services, a countywide restriction seems appropriate.

2. **Limit the Use of MRTIP to Five Travel Vouchers per Month for Each Eligible Resident** - Staff reviewed the frequency of use of the MRTIP program for the past nine months, and determined that most participants use MRTIP five or fewer times per month (see Table 2). Paratransit taxi services offered by other cities in northern Alameda County use demand management strategies to limit trips or the cost of trips. For example, Albany reimburses taxi trips only up to \$20 per trip; Berkeley provides up to \$360 per year of free taxi travel vouchers to participants; Oakland provides up to \$336 per year of free taxi travel vouchers to participants; and Emeryville limits expenditures per participant to \$320 per year.

Staff proposes to restrict the use of MRTIP to five travel vouchers per month for each eligible resident as a demand management strategy. This approach will spread the service over a wider number of potential participants while addressing budget concerns. As shown in Table 2, this will accommodate the majority of users. When compared to neighboring jurisdictions, Alameda's program with the proposed changes would exceed the benefits offered by other cities. Staff estimates a maximum benefit of \$1,200 per year for each participant, assuming the trip costs equal \$20.

**Table 2 - MRTIP Participant Usage**

	May 2010	June 2010	July 2010	August 2010	Sept 2010	Oct 2010	Nov 2010	Dec 2010	Jan 2011
<b>Active Customers</b>	36	47	46	40	47	48	42	42	49
<b>Participant Usage &gt; 10x per Month</b>	4	4	4	5	4	2	2	2	1
<b>Participant Usage &gt; 7x per Month</b>	4	5	5	5	7	4	3	2	1
<b>Participant Usage &gt; 5x per Month</b>	6	8	5	6	8	5	4	2	1
<b>% of Users &gt; 5x per Month</b>	17%	17%	11%	15%	17%	10%	10%	5%	2%
<b>Savings Estimate *</b>	\$120	\$160	\$100	\$120	\$160	\$100	\$80	\$40	\$20

\* Assumes an average trip cost of \$20 per trip.

3. **Require the Paratransit Transportation Providers to Install Taxi Meters in Lift-equipped Vans** - Taxi service providers are compensated at \$2.60 per mile for Premium Taxi Service and MRTIP trips that require the use of a lift-equipped van. The Premium Taxi Service participants who require a lift-equipped van for wheelchairs pay \$2.50 per trip and are able to travel an unlimited distance. This subsidy is considerably more than provided for ambulatory individuals who obtain 50% discount on taxi rides when using the Premium Taxi Service. Since lift-equipped vans are typically not equipped with taxi meters, the taxi service providers cannot charge a taxi rate to the participant and instead charge a per mile rate.

Eliminating wheelchair travel vouchers and using lift-equipped vans with taxi meters will create a more equitable fee schedule for individuals in wheelchairs. These individuals will purchase the same Premium Taxi Service discounted travel vouchers as the other participants. Welcome Transportation Group, one of the taxi service providers, has agreed to place taxi meters on all their lift-equipped vans to ensure a more equitable service for individuals in wheelchairs. Staff is in discussion with Veterans Cab, the other taxi provider, regarding the installation of taxi meters on its lift-equipped vans.

4. **Place Expiration Dates on the Premium Taxi Service and MRTIP Travel Vouchers** - Currently, the Premium Taxi Service and MRTIP travel vouchers do not have a time limit for being valid, which has led to an accumulation of travel vouchers. Other city-based Paratransit taxi services in northern Alameda County, such as Oakland and Berkeley, use expiration dates to forecast operating costs. Staff proposes to have all new Premium Taxi Service and MRTIP travel vouchers be valid for one year. This strategy would reduce the on-going accumulation of travel vouchers and would enable staff to develop forecasts for ongoing operating costs. Participants still could accumulate travel vouchers for up to one year so that they could use them when needed at a future date.

5. **Provide Additional \$5,000 Funding for the FY10-11 Paratransit Taxi Service Program** - For FY10-11, the budget for the Paratransit taxi service is \$50,000. The current projections show that the budget may be exceeded, especially due to the variability in demand and the increased marketing efforts. To ensure that the City does not turn away prospective Paratransit taxi service customers, staff requests allocating an additional \$5,000 for the program.

**Outreach** – From December 2010 through February 2011, Public Works staff presented the proposed Paratransit Taxi Service Program modifications to the Transportation Commission (December), Recreation and Park Commission (January), Social Service Human Relations Board (January) and the Commission on Disability Issues (February). Based on the comments received, staff has provided the following:

1. Extend and replace expired travel vouchers with new travel vouchers valid for one year.

Response – Staff does not support this request as it would nullify the purpose of an expiration date.

2. Start taxi meters once taxi begins moving and not once the pick-up begins for individuals in wheelchairs.

Response - One of the transportation providers, Welcome Transportation, already operates this way. The other transportation provider, Veterans Cab, does not have taxi meters in its lift-equipped vans.

3. Allow for a process to apply for dialysis consideration using MRTIP.

Response - Due to budgetary constraints, staff is recommending individuals in need of more than five MRTIP travel vouchers per month use EBP. This recommendation is consistent with other city-based taxi services in that they do not act as the primary transportation service for dialysis and other critical care patients.

**Conclusions** - Based on a review of Paratransit taxi programs in other Alameda County jurisdictions and community feedback, Public Works staff proposes the following Paratransit Taxi Service Program modifications:

1. Set Alameda County as the boundary of the Premium Taxi Service and MRTIP. Currently, the participants are able to travel an unlimited distance. This recommendation is expected to provide an annual estimated savings of approximately \$5,000, assuming the current demand.
2. Limit the use of MRTIP to five travel vouchers per month for each eligible resident. Currently, MRTIP provides an unlimited number of free taxi trips when returning home from medical appointments. This recommendation is expected to provide an annual estimated savings of approximately \$1,200, assuming an average trip cost of \$20 per trip and the past demand.
3. Require Paratransit transportation providers to operate lift-equipped vans with taxi meters. Using lift-equipped vans with taxi meters will create a more equitable fee schedule for individuals in wheelchairs who use the Premium Taxi Service. This recommendation is expected to provide an annual estimated savings of approximately \$500, assuming the past demand.

4. Place expiration dates on the Premium Taxi Service and MRTIP travel vouchers. Currently, the travel vouchers do not have a time limit for being valid, causing an accumulation of travel vouchers. A proposed one-year expiration date for the travel vouchers would allow staff to forecast operating costs.
5. Provide an additional \$5,000 in Measure B funding for the FY10-11 Paratransit Taxi Service Program. Currently, no contingency fund exists. Contingency monies would help ensure that the City does not turn away prospective Paratransit taxi service customers, if the demand were to exceed the Paratransit Program budget.

The proposed changes will bring the Paratransit taxi program in line with neighboring jurisdictions and will not impact the users significantly. These recommendations are consistent with the service level guidelines that the Alameda County Transportation Commission's Paratransit Advisory and Planning Committee (PAPCO) have approved.

#### FINANCIAL IMPACT

The Paratransit taxi services are funded with Measure B Paratransit Funds in the City's budget for FY10-11. There are sufficient funds available to provide the additional \$5,000 requested by staff (Fund 287, Program 4225). There is no impact to the General Fund.

#### MUNICIPAL CODE/POLICY DOCUMENT CROSS REFERENCE

The Paratransit taxi program supports the General Plan Objective 4.1.5 "Consider the transportation needs of the community, including those with limited mobility options", and the General Plan Policy 4.1.5.b: "Continue to support the Paratransit program."

#### ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

In accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), this project is Statutory Exempt under CEQA Guidelines, Section 15723. Rates, Tolls, Fares, and Charges with the findings that:

1. Changes are necessary to maintain service within the service area.
2. Changes are necessary to provide an equitable distribution of services.
3. Changes are necessary for future financial forecasting.

Honorable Mayor and  
Members of the City Council

March 15, 2011  
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RECOMMENDATION

Approve modifications to the paratransit taxi service, appropriate \$5,000 in Measure B funds, and authorize the Acting City Manager to execute all necessary documents.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "M. Naclerio".

Matthew T. Naclerio  
Public Works Director

By:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Gail Payne".

Gail Payne  
Transportation Coordinator

Approved as to funds and account,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Fred Marsh".

Fred Marsh  
Controller

cc: Watchdog Committee